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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000948

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SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: DEFENSE SECRETARY AGREES TO APPOINT
CIVIL-MILITARY LIAISON OFFICERS TO FACILITATE UN AND NGO
ACCESS IN NORTH AND EAST

REF: COLOMBO 769

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr. for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Ambassador, Swiss Ambassador Flint and the Head of the European Commission Humanitarian Office Verboom presented Defense Secretary Rajapakse on June 29 the findings and recommendations of the Bilateral Donor Group (BDG) visit in May to the Vanni (the LTTE-controlled area of northern Sri Lanka). The Defense Secretary approved the principal operational recommendation concerning his Ministry which was to appoint senior civil-military liaisons in the towns of Vavuniya (for issues involving access to LTTE-controlled areas in the north), Batticaloa and Trincomalee. In a follow-on meeting on July 3 with Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Samarasinghe, Samarasinghe agreed to explore the Ambassador's idea of issuing a notice in the Government Gazette to specify exactly which humanitarian supplies for the north should receive automatic approval and what the monthly quotas should be for more sensitive items that might potentially used by the LTTE for military purposes (such as steel bars and cement to build bunkers). Both measures, if formally approved, could substantially the problems of access that the UN and international NGOs have experienced in both the north and east. End Summary

Key Recommendations

12. (C) Reftel provided the full text of the BDG report. Verboom and his Swiss counterpart conducted the visit and prepared the report. Ambassador participated in the meeting

in his role as the Co-Chair representative on the Coordinating Committee on Humanitarian Affairs. The report's key recommendations were as follows:

To the Government of Sri Lanka:

- (a) Allow access and presence of humanitarian agencies and their donors in order to implement and monitor the activities.
- (b) Allow access for humanitarian supplies into the Vanni: uncontroversial items like groceries, non-food relief items, food security items (seeds and food), medicines and emergency shelter materials should receive simple formal (e.g. unrestricted) access, while for more sensitive items, (fuel, cement, steel, fertilizer, etc.) a monthly quota should be approved and routinely given to the ICRC, UN and the approved international NGOs.
- (c) To improve the Coordinating Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (CCHA) approval procedures a senior Civil-Military Liaison Officer should be appointed to link MFA, CGES, and MOD approvals to the Military Commander on the ground at Vavuniya Omanthai.
- (d) Reverse the (government-controlled) media's demonization of the implementing agencies by issuing supportive statements praising their activities and contributions.
- (e) Protect civilians in accordance with international humanitarian law and do not undertake air strikes or shelling in populated areas.

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To the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam:

- (a) Cease the forced recruitment of civilians of any age, and facilitate the immediate release of humanitarian aid workers.
- (b) Prevent civilians from being dragged into the conflict and reverse the climate of manipulation and oppression; do not use civilians as human shields.
- (c) Provide freedom of movement in and out of the Vanni.
- (d) Allow humanitarian convoys and provide security.
- (e) Prevent and abstain from any misuse or diversion of humanitarian aid supplies and equipment.

Positive Reaction from GSL

13. (C) Secretary Rajapakse approved the principal operational recommendation concerning his Ministry which was to appoint senior civil-military liaisons in the towns of Vavuniya (for issues involving access to LTTE-controlled areas in the north), Batticaloa and Trincomalee. We agreed that he would announce this decision and the names of the liaison officers at the July 27 meeting of the Coordinating Committee on Humanitarian Assistance (CCHA).

14. (C) Ambassador and Verboom briefed Minister of Disaster Management and Human Rights Samarasinghe on July 3 on the contents of the BDG report and the Defense Secretary's agreement to appoint civil-military liaisons. Samarasinghe welcomed the Secretary's decision commenting that it would help resolve many of the issues that have complicated access issues for months. On the question of how to improve access for humanitarian supplies in the north, Ambassador suggested that the GSL issue a notice in the official Gazette to specify exactly which humanitarian supplies should receive automatic approval and what the monthly quotas should be for more sensitive items that might potentially be used by the

LTTE for military purposes (such as steel bars and cement to build bunkers). Such a notice would go a long way to help regularize humanitarian shipments to the north. Samarasinghe agreed a Gazette notice would be useful and requested that Verboom work with the UN and NGOs in the Interagency Standing Committee to come up with a draft notice that could be considered at the July 27 CCHA.

Comment

15. (C) We are encouraged that the GSL has reacted positively to our suggestions of civil-military liaisons and a Gazette notice for humanitarian supplies for the Vanni. Both steps could help to reduce substantially the problems of access that the UN and international NGOs have experienced in both the north and east.

BLAKE